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The discourse on emotion in ancient Mesopotamia : a theoretical approach

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Sara Kipfer (ed.)

Visualizing Emotions in the Ancient Near East



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Sara Kipfer (*1980) studied Protestant Theology in Bern and Heidelberg. She holds a PhD of the University of Bern (2013) and is the author of *Der bedrohte David. Eine exegetische und rezeptionsgeschichtliche Studie zu 1Sam 16–1Kön 2* (Studies of the Bible and its Reception 3), Berlin: De Gruyter, 2015. From 2013 to 2015 she contributed as a postdoc to a research project funded by the Swiss National Science Foundation on “Emotions in the Old Testament. Analysing linguistic metaphors as an interdisciplinary approach in the field of research concerning historical emotions” (PI: Prof. Andreas Wagner). Since September 2015 she is an SNSF-funded fellow at the universities of Chicago and Heidelberg. Her research focuses on reception-historical exegesis, biblical anthropology and prophecy.

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Preface

This volume is the product of a workshop held at the 61st Rencontre Assyriologique Internationale (RAI) in Geneva and Bern on 22–26 June 2015. I would like to thank the organizers of the Rencontre for accepting my application for the workshop, foremost Mirko Novák and Sabine Ecklin, for their encouragement and help.

Most of the articles in this volume are expanded and revised versions of papers presented at the morning panel during the workshop “Visualizing Emotions and Senses in the Ancient Near East”, which I organized together with Ainsley Hawthorn (Yale University) and Anne-Caroline Rendu Loisel (University of Geneva). An unpublished article by Othmar Keel, which he wrote in the 1990s, has been added to the volume. Wolfgang Zwickel, who was also present at the workshop, agreed to revise and reprint an earlier published article of his own. Karen Sonik accepted my invitation to contribute her thoughts on the subject of emotion in Mesopotamian art, while John Baines in his epilogue comments on the volume from the perspective of Egyptian art. I am very grateful to all the authors for their huge effort.

I would also like to offer my thanks to all contributors to the workshop for their constructive and well-focused presentations and to everyone for participating and further stimulating the discussion during and after the Rencontre, especially to Irene Winter. It was a very fruitful interdisciplinary conversation and I am excited to present some of its most important results in this volume.

The workshop at the Rencontre Assyriologique Internationale was financed by the Promotion Fund for Early Career Researchers at the University of Bern (Nachwuchsförderungs-Projektpool der Mittelbauvereinigung der Universität Bern). The Berne University Research Foundation and the Reformed Churches of the Cantons Bern-Jura-Solothurn funded the printing costs for the volume.

As editor of this volume, I am especially grateful to Christoph Uehlinger, senior editor of the series *Orbis Biblicus et Orientalis*, not only for accepting this volume for publication in this series and for his help throughout the editing process, but also for his many supportive suggestions and his expertise in improving the text. I would also like to sincerely thank Andreas Wagner, who encouraged and enabled me to organize the workshop during my time as a postdoctoral researcher at the University of Bern on the Swiss National Science Foundation-funded research project on “Emotions in the Old Testament”.

And last but not least I am very grateful to Marshall Cunningham, who helped me in the editing of the English articles.

Sara Kipfer, Heidelberg / Bern 2017

The Discourse on Emotion in Ancient Mesopotamia: A Theoretical Approach¹

Margaret JAKUES

1. Introduction

The study of the expression of emotion in ancient Mesopotamia is subject to the boundaries implied by a language and a culture that disappeared two thousand years ago. For lack of an anthropological approach to the Sumerians and the Akkadians themselves, we have to concentrate on its epiphenomena, which are the texts in which they expressed these emotions. Through the numerous documents that the Sumerians and Akkadians left us, is it possible to understand and analyse their emotions, not as psychologists or anthropologists, but as historians? While this question may at first sight seem surprising, its stake is part of a broader contemporary research context.²

We must first answer a methodological question: How is it possible to study emotions in ancient history? And how can we understand a subjective vocabulary in two extinct languages written on old, often broken, clay tablets? Lacking cuneiform treatises concerned with emotion words and in the absence of modern global studies on the subject, we are left to gather as much as possible from miscellaneous words in a multiplicity of documents. Those words, we think, are likely to designate emotions that reflect the contexts in which they appear. The methodological questions are very pragmatical: Do particular emotions occur in good or bad situations? Which narrative character expresses which emotion, in what period and in what context? What reaction does the expression of an emotion provoke?

¹ This article is based on my doctoral dissertation on Sumerian vocabulary of emotion (Jaques 2006). Sumerian words are transliterated in normal script (ki áĝ); Akkadian words are written in italic (*rāmu*); "=" (in A_{sum.} = B_{akk.}) should be understood as "belonging to the same semantic field of" or "is parallel with" rather than "signifies" or "is equivalent to". Concepts of emotion with elements of meaning are indicated between straight quotation marks ("joy"). For English corrections, I thank Emmert Clevensine.

² I have in mind here the new subfield of history known as "emotionology" and the history of American religions. In France, one of the first to research in this domain was Fevbre, "La sensibilité et l'histoire: Comment reconstituer la vie affective d'autrefois" (1941: 5-20). For ancient Mesopotamia, Oppenheim (1967) argued in his chapter "Can these bones live?" that in order to penetrate beneath the surface of the texts, we must search for "immediateness", that is, the perception of "both the unusual and the atypical diction and the echoes and allusions". Fevbre and Oppenheim each in their own way wanted to attempt a kind of "virtual fieldwork" as in anthropology.

Under these conditions, a delimitation of the field of investigation on the basis of our own emotional experience would only distort things by imposing artificial criteria on the text. To look elsewhere, in another, completely different cultural environment or historical era, for similar features of what the discourse on emotions was in Mesopotamia, would end up not only at a dead-end but also at totally erroneous notions. Other approaches to emotion research, whether philosophical, religious, psychological, ethnological, historical or linguistic, are not however without interest for our study. Historical and ethnological analyses allow us first to set down some principles such as the distinction between the emotions and the (meta-)language used to describe emotion.³ Indeed, when an emotion appears at a given time, for example in Old Babylonian texts, we must ask ourselves what appears exactly, whether it is a new sensitivity or a new rhetoric. The only thing that we are sure of is that specific language expressing a certain type of emotion has appeared. But this does not prove of course that this emotion was not felt before.

Alain Corbin, a specialist in the study of 19th-century French thought, sets forth three reasons why an emotion may remain “non-said” (non-dit) in a given language: it is not-said because it is overly perceived (like the noise of cars in the street today), it is not-said because it is impossible to say (the word to express it does not exist) or because it is not the tradition to say it (for example, an emotional response to nature in a non-industrial society), and it is not said because it is forbidden to say it. To name an emotion is thus not a natural process, but an artificial creation, a cultural fact.⁴ To each culture, to each society belongs a specific vocabulary expressing a certain number of emotions, according to a more or less broad or a more or less precise perspective. In the absence of all discourse about emotion by the Sumerians and the Akkadians themselves, it would be difficult to interpret why such an emotion does not appear in their writings or why a particular

³ Larsen (2001: 278) distinguishes between a “discourse on emotion” and an “emotional discourse”. Bamberg (1997: 309) develops these two research angles. An emotional discourse is for him a two-fold form of discourse: a linguistic and an extralinguistic one (facial expression, body posture, proximity, etc.). In this view, “language and emotion are two concurrent, parallel systems in use, and their relationship exists in that one system (emotion) impacts on the performance of the other (language)”. On the other hand, a discourse on emotion starts from the assumption that language “reflects” objects in the world, among them the emotions: “Language have emotion terms, and people across the world engage in talk *about* the emotions”. In this other view, “Language is a means of making sense of emotions”. As objects of study, it is important to distinguish between the study of emotions as the object of phenomenology, theology or psychology and the study of the discourse on emotion as the object of history and of linguistic and cultural anthropology. These different approaches are of course not exclusive.

⁴ Lutz (1988: 209) concludes with the remark that “emotion experience (...) is more aptly viewed as the outcome of social relations and their corollary worldviews than as universal psychobiological entities”. We find a similar remark in Grima (1992: 6): “Emotion is culture.”

emotion is mentioned more often in reference to the relationship between man and god than to that between man and woman. It is, however, important to take note of these phenomena and to draw a chart as complete as possible of the emotions expressed and surely lived by the people of Mesopotamia.

The material for this study has been collected from three types of texts: lexical lists, royal inscriptions, and "literary" texts. The word "literary" must be taken in a broad sense, as it includes narrative documents as well as poetical texts, omens, and letters. These three types of sources do not have the same structure or the same goals, and the information that we obtain from them is varied and complementary. The case of the lexical lists is special because the terms are "without context", as would be the entries of a glossary without commentary. They enumerate Sumerian or Akkadian words, give written forms, and in bilingual lists add Akkadian, sometimes Hittite, translations. Their contents are gathered under a common denominator such as first names, professional names, names of objects in wood or of animals. The absence of a heading "emotion" poses straightaway the difficulty of classifying words gathered and interpreted today as "emotion words" of ancient cultures. For the ancient people of Mesopotamia, emotions did not belong to an overarching class of psychological or cultural experience, but were distinct notions, apparently without any link between them. To pose a type "emotion" is a theoretical artifice allowing modern research to take place. It cannot, however, presuppose the reality of such a type in ancient Mesopotamia.

There is a multiplicity of emotion words in Sumerian and Akkadian that scholars render with the help of conventional *ad hoc* translations, even if they are aware that the concepts of that time do not correspond to the modern equivalents. Even in modern languages, when we look at the stock of emotion words in a given language, often we do not find exactly corresponding words in other languages: to appreciate this, it is enough to compare the German word "Glück" with the English word "happiness".⁵

Before one risks a definition or a classification of this vocabulary, a study on and around the signification of each word must also be performed. The first source of information on the meaning, and by far the most reliable one, is the immediate literary context. This implies that language is the obligatory way to access historical knowledge. The first step in any research is to decipher and understand the texts we have at hand. In a second step, one can make semantic comparisons between Akkadian translations of Sumerian material and other Semitic languages. The Akkadian translations, which come either from the lexical lists or from bilingual texts, although contemporary with the Sumerian speakers, cannot serve as the unique basis

⁵ For the same observation concerning the English word "anger", see Harkins/Wierzbicka (2001: 3ff.).

for the attribution of meaning, because these translations are not philological in nature, and their purpose was not to produce exact semantic equivalents, but more of adequations. One can also look in other directions: through the study of etymology when it is possible, and on the base of one's own common sense. Indeed, these steps do not produce proofs, as is so often the case in the study of ancient cultures, but rather highlight tendencies that make a researcher incline toward one manner of understanding rather than toward another one. These first tools provide a necessary preliminary framework into which successive elements of research can be woven.⁶

2. *Classification of the Vocabulary of Emotion*

If emotions are indeed cultural, they are not invariable.⁷ They are a socially validated judgement from individuals rather than an innate category. Therefore research has to focus on emotion words and on the domains of meaning expressed by the texts associated with them. Study of the discourse on emotion has to concentrate on the norms of expression, which may appear radically different to the outside observer.

The expression of emotions in ancient Mesopotamia can be classified into broad categories. In a very schematic manner and by basing oneself on the corpus mentioned before, we can differentiate the material into "conventional expression" and "non-conventional expression". In conventional discourse, an identical and recurring expression can be compared and inscribed in a chart almost out of context. This is the case, for example, for

⁶ Natural Semantic Metalanguage (NSM) as a tool for cross-cultural analysis of emotion words is a theory developed by Wierzbicka (see Harkins/Wierzbicka 2001: 8-16). Emotion words are "complex (decomposable) and culture-specific" concepts which cannot simply be translated into another language. To understand emotion words, "experts" need to understand the explanations of ordinary people. For that they have to share a common language made of "simple and universal words" like "good"/"bad", "think", "people", "I", "you" etc.

This tool is likely to function in fieldwork, but it meets difficulties in historical research: In ancient cultures, texts do not reveal all "statements of meanings" because the historian cannot reach all the layers of a society. For Pongratz-Leisten (2001: 196) "historical research has to be aware that the city-oriented language power creates its own dimension of meaning and conceives of city life as inherently superior to life in the countryside and in the steppe". Also Larsen (2001: 283) "we must (...) realise that such statements reach us through layers of conventions and social and linguistic norms". It is clear that in his research, the historian meets not historical facts but rather the conception of the world expressed by urban literate elite.

⁷ For a review of the radical opposition between different points of view that lead to different theories, see the chapter "Tensions in the study of emotion" in Lutz/White 1986: 406ff. Lutz also explains these theories in the chapter "Emotion, thought, and estrangement: Western discourses on feeling" (1988: 53-80).

the repetitive material of the royal inscriptions that are not intended to convey real emotions but rather appropriate, formal expressions of feelings on specific occasions. In a non-conventional expression, on the other hand, each relationship has an interest and an importance in itself. It is appropriate to distinguish in these expressions between the more realistic ones and the more idealistic versions. The main difficulty is in fact inherent in the topic of the research itself precisely because emotions are cultural automatisms, that is, they need not be commented on. Acquired conventions, norms, and habits dictate what emotion can be shown to whom and in which contexts. Sometimes we can find no reason for emotion. Daily life very largely escapes the written sources, yet emotions were lived daily by the ancient people of Mesopotamia.

On the chart of words for emotions, it appears that certain terms are used very often, others more seldom, and some very rarely. We see an analytical frame organising itself, with on one side an abundance of data, metaphorical images, and descriptions, and on the other side a surprising poverty of elements. One has to be aware not to fall into the trap of the “said” and “non-said” as mentioned by Corbin (2000), but must also be able to identify the norms that order their differences and to observe their modulations in the documents. Different factors – for example the literary corpus in which a vocabulary is attested first, but also perhaps historical, religious, or moral aspects – can have influenced their representation systems, their differences, and their permanencies. Armed with these methodological observations, one can concentrate on the lexical question and distinguish eleven categories of emotion in Mesopotamia: The vocabulary of “joy”, “anger”, “love”, “hate”, “sadness”, “fear”, and different statements for “trouble”, “compassion” and one word for “jealousy”.

Besides surmounting the difficulties of translation, it is also necessary to focus on the manner in which this terminology would have behaved in context: Is it employed in epithets? With which agent or subject? To these two questions, we should add the separate study of what we might call the words or expressions used in closely related senses that do not belong to the vocabulary of emotion, like “darkness” or “twisted”, which appear in similar contexts.

This approach makes it possible to identify constant features. When we speak in terms of emotion, this implies either an isolated subject or the perception by an agent of a given reality. In other words, the emotion is a moral, aesthetic, or legal judgement about reality or a personal quality or shortcoming. This distinction is important as, confronted with the question “why is such a god, such a hero, or such a man happy?” we have the choice, following the grammatical construction of the sentence, between an incidental cause (“he is happy *because* of such a thing, such an event, or such ritual”) or a permanent nature (“he has a happy, good, optimistic na-

ture”). This distinction can have historical or religious premises. It may also have historical and religious consequences.

On the other hand, it appears during the textual analysis that the contexts are either individual and internal, or collective, external and ritual. This observation has implications that are not as simple as they may seem. It means that ancient Mesopotamian emotions can be seen either as a psychological impression of an affect or as the expression of a social and religious norm. The latter applies in particular to terminology for joy and sadness. Gary Anderson, in a book with the evocative title *A Time to Cry, a Time to Dance* (1995), studied this problematic in the Jewish religion: the word *šimḥa* "joy" can be used in the same contexts and occurrences as modern European terms, but like the words for "love" and "honour" in the Hebrew Bible, *šimḥa* also appears in legal texts. "Joy" can thus be prescribed on certain occasions, such as sacrificial feasting or the performance of psalms. The rites expressing "joy" stand in precise opposition to rites of "mourning".

"Joy"

Eating and drinking

Praise of God

Anointing with oil

Festal garments

"Mourning"

Fasting

Lamentation

Putting ashes or dust on one's head

Sackcloth or torn clothes

2.1. Need, demand and the positive relationship to others: the emotions of "joy", "love" and "compassion"

Observing the varieties of the data gives us the opportunity to reflect on the elements of continuity and rupture inside the expression of need, demand and positive relationship with others. "Joy" is the most representative emotion in the general corpus, probably because most of the texts we possess have a hymnal character. To express it, the Sumerians had no fewer than four verbs and three substantives, corresponding to twice as many Akkadian equivalents (verbs and their derivatives, or idiomatic clauses). Such richness can be explained by the patchwork of expressions describing "joy" in different situations: individual or communal, isolated or relational. The Sumerian word *hul₂* and the Akkadian equivalent *ḥadû* are the *terminus technicus* for "joy" meaning in the most general manner "to be happy, to rejoice". The other words express as many emotions as situations: The Sumerian composed verb, *ul te(.ĝ)*, for example, refers to a joy linked with drunkenness and euphoria: "The gods Enki (and) Ninmaḥ drink beer, their heart become elated (*ul te(.ĝ)*)"⁸. It may also have sexual connotations: "The

⁸ Enki et Ninmaḥ Sect. II 15: ^dEn-ki-ke₄ ^dNin-maḥ-e kaš im-na₈-na₈-ne ša₃-bi ul mu-un-te.

god Enki became elated (ul te(.ĝ) (at the sight) of the goddess Uttu; lying in her crotch, he clasped her to the bosom”⁹. On the other hand, the composed verb ša₃ dug₃ which, according to its etymology, is a quality (dug₃ “good”) of the heart (ša₃), is used more to show the satisfaction, especially in a juridical context, for example after a debt has been repaid,¹⁰ but also for contentment and well-being in general.

There are specific collective occasions where the use of words of “joy” is common, the most important one being religious and royal festivities. The festival day is itself metaphorically called in Akkadian “day of joy” (*ūm ḥidūtu*) or “play, entertainment” (*mēlultu*). The texts give the principal aspects of festive rejoicing: banquets, prayers and praises, familial life, sexual relationships, music, etc. These positive aspects appear in the counsels of Siduri, the ale-wife, to Gilgameš who is seeking eternal life after the death of his companion Enkidu.¹¹

Humor is attested principally in late Babylonian literature, but throughout Sumerian and Akkadian texts we find proverbs, jokes, and word plays, whose goal is to make readers laugh. Humor of this sort was originally the creation of students, and it belonged to the school curriculum, especially when in the form of debates between two partners such as the Hoe and the Plough, the Bird and the Fish, or the Grain and the Sheep.

“Joy” is the sign of a good and healthy relationship with gods. This “normal order of things” is expressed in Sumerian by the expression “to look on someone with a joyful eye” (*igi ḥul₂ bar*) or “to have a luminous forehead” (*saĝ-ki zalag*). This joy, which has the magical power to heal the sick person, always comes from the gods’ side and is often linked to the act of determining a good fate: “The god An threw him (= the king) a joyful eye (*igi ḥul₂*) (and) determined for him a good fate.”¹²

“Love”, expressed by the Sumerian *ki aĝ₂* (= *rāmu* in Akkadian), is one of the substantives most used in the literature of all periods. The etymology of the Sumerian word *ki aĝ₂* is controversial: until recently *ki* was considered to mean “earth” and *aĝ₂* to be the verb “to measure”, so that “to love” would etymologically mean “to measure a piece of land”! New research, especially on the written form of the word *ki*, have shown that in this case it cannot signify “earth”¹³. The Akkadian word *rāmu* corresponds

⁹ Enki et Ninḫursaĝa 179-180: ^dEn-ki-ke₄ ^dUttu-ra ul im-m[a]-ni-in-t[i] gaba šu im-mi-in-dab ur₂-ra-[n]a nu₂-a.

¹⁰ Muffs 1975.

¹¹ For the well-known discourse of Siduri to Gilgameš, see George 2003: 278-279. Tigay (1982: 167ff.) qualifies these recommendations as *carpe diem* in a chapter on “Traditional Speech Forms”. For an analysis of this passage, see Abusch 1993a: 1-14; id. 1993b: 3-17; id. 1993c: 53-62.

¹² Hymn to Ninšubur and her city(?) A-akkil rev. 3: An-ne₂ igi ḥul₂-la mu-ši-in-bar nam dug₃ mu-ši-i[n-tar] (cf. Sjöberg 1982: 72 no.4).

¹³ *ki* “earth” has a final -0 (*ki*+locative = *ki*-‘a), whereas *ki* in *ki aĝ₂* is syllabically written: *ki*-ig, *ki*-ga and *ki*-in.

to the Arabic word *ra'ima*.¹⁴ "Love" in ancient Mesopotamia is used primarily in religious contexts. To give "love" to humans is a privilege of gods. It is the expression of an agreement in a political and juridical contractual relationship between a god and another god of lower standing or a human being, for example the king Šulgi: "Šulgi, (the beloved of her heart =) the favorite one of the goddess Ninlil."¹⁵

A change in this conception of the hierarchy can be observed in the royal hymns of Šulgi. During the third dynasty of Ur the kings were divinized. The name Šulgi was written from around his 10th year of reign onward with the determinative *diġir* "god". The kings stood on an equal level with the gods and they could both "love" (like a god) and "be loved" (like a king or a human being). This different relationship appears also in the use of the derivative participle *ki aġ₂-(ġa₂)* (= *narāmu*) in epithets for gods and for kings.

The symmetrical opposite word for *ki aġ₂* "love" is *ḫul gig* "to hate". *ki aġ₂* and *ḫul gig* often appear in opposition in declarations of value or in moral judgement, for example in opposing "justice" and "iniquity": "The god Sîn who loves justice, who hates iniquity".¹⁶ The same occurrence is attested with the Akkadian equivalents *rāmu* "to love" and *zêru* "to hate": "Hate evil, love justice!"¹⁷

"Love" appears in affective contexts in the literature between gods, especially in the Love Songs for the Sacred Marriage ritual.¹⁸ In a late celebration, the Akkadian *rāmu* is attested with words for affection, tenderness and sexual attractiveness such as *dādu* / *dādū* "beloved one, dear", *inbu* "fruit" also "sexual fullness", *kuzbu* "seduction, attraction, sensuality", *šīhtu* "laugh". The word for "love" in Akkadian seems to have changed from a juridical meaning to a more emotional one.

The Sumerian word *arḫuš*, like its Akkadian equivalent *rēmu* (a word that has nothing to do with *rāmu* "to love"), is used to refer to an emotion close to what in English might be termed our "compassion". In Sumerian and in Akkadian the word also means "womb". The semantic relationship between "compassion" and "womb", even if it is found elsewhere in the ancient Near East, is not self-evident.¹⁹ It is true that in modern culture the

¹⁴ See Barth 1909: 3f. and Wehr ⁵1985: 441.

¹⁵ Šulgi D 13: Šul-gi ^dNin-lil₂-la₂ ki aġ₂ ša₃-ga-na.

¹⁶ Lugalbanda and Ḫurru 215-216: ^dSîn-e niġ₂-si-sa₂-e ki aġ₂ niġ₂-erim₂-e ḫul gig.

¹⁷ BE 1/1 no. 83 rev. 24: *lemutta zērma kitta rām*.

¹⁸ The Sumerian Sacred Marriage ritual is partially known from its description in the hymn of Iddin-Dagan and Inanna, see Römer 1965: 128-208. During the Isin dynasty and probably before, the probably very ancient ritual included sexual intercourse between the king and a priestess representing the goddess Inanna. In the 1st millennium, the marriage was celebrated between the gods represented by their cult statues and no longer by human actors. The best known example is the marriage between the gods Marduk and Šarpānītu in Babylon, see Lapinskivi 2004 with numerous references.

¹⁹ See Stoebe 1976: 761-768.

“womb” is a metaphor for maternal protection, love, and pity, but the linguistic derivation from a substantive referring to a concretely defined unit (“a substance of constant quality”)²⁰ to a verb describing an emotion is an aspect that should be clarified.

“Compassion” is often used in divine epithets, mostly in apposition with the name of a goddess rather than of a god. It also appears in parallel construction with words for “prayer”: “Mother of the land, who has compassion, who loves veneration, who listens to prayer”.²¹ It is thus the gods who one asks for “compassion”, which is often linked with appeasing divine anger and the topic of the “return” of the god “to his (previous) place” (ki-bi-šè gi₄), which means to his normal, positive mood toward humans. The compassion of the gods, once granted, is indicated by words and gestures of help and renewed recognition. The movement in the emotion is always from above to below, that is, a god always gives compassion to someone of an inferior standing. As a divine quality or divine favour, “compassion” can only be the expression of an elite.

2.2. Principle of justice, domination, and the emotions of “anger” and “hate”

“Anger” is well attested in the Mesopotamian corpus. In the Old Assyrian letters, the large number of expressions of anger, irritation or reproach is striking. The expression of such emotion is mostly judged negatively: “Although we never made you angry, as for you – we have become non-gentlemen in your eyes”.²² Some essential features of “gentlemanly behaviour” imply living up to norms of a social code that include self-control and politeness.²³ It is very important not to cause anger, worry, or distress to friends or relatives.

Not to anger the gods is a topic of mythological and religious texts. The god’s anger is communicated through divine omens or signs that are more than a warning, the germ of unhappiness already infecting the person and their environment with negative energy. The gods demonstrate their anger through a specific attitude: he “turns his face away” (igi niĝin = *pānī suhḫuru*) and looks with an “evil eye” (igi ḫul = *īnu lemuttu*) also called

²⁰ See Mounin 1974, 325.

²¹ Sin-iddinam to Nininsina 9: ama kalam-ma arḫuš šud₃-de₃ ki aĝ₂ a-r[a-zu-e ĝiš tu]ku (cf. Hallo 1976: 209-224).

²² TC 3, 1:23-27: *matīma libbaka ula nulammin attā ana lā awīlī ina ēnīka šaknāni*.

²³ The topic of self-control is found especially in letters: “Be a man! Do not let yourself loose to drink!” This controlled behaviour is also expected from princes: “It is with the servants that you began spending more than what you had and wasting! Come on, don’t be a baby! They only come to see you for..., for leading you astray, for the ale-house and the music-hall!” (ARM 1, 28 = Durand 1997, 16 no.2:11-13 and 15-19). For a study of the critique made by soldiers of city life as too soft and effeminate, see Lion 2003: 17f.

“eye of death” (igi uš₂). The evil eye can kill humans, and even gods when sent by a rival god. This is well illustrated by a passage in the myth of Descent of Inanna to the Netherworld, where Inanna, angered by the behavior of her lover Dumuzi, who has been indifferent to the news of her death, decides to hand him over to bad demons: “She (= Inanna) looked at him (= Dumuzi), it was the look of death (igi uš₂). She spoke to him; it was the speech of anger. She shouted to him, it was the shout of heavy guilt: ‘How much longer? Take him away!’ Holy Inanna gave Dumuzi the shepherd into their hands (= of the demons)”.²⁴

The person who perceives this anger has the possibility to divert its negative effects by making a namburbi ritual (literally “its dissolving [procedure]”). If the negative effects are already present, it can remove the effects by means of penitential prayers and rituals like the eršaḫūga (“lament to soothe the heart (of the god)”) or the diġiršadaba (“incantation to change the angry heart of the god”). The end of the divine anger is signified by the “return of the god to his previous place” (ki-bi-še₃ gi₄) and by his “looking with a joyful eye” (igi ḫul₂ bar).

“Anger” can be justifiable when it is directed against enemies who endanger not only the nation but the whole cultural achievement. It represents morality and legitimate domination.

The technical term for “hate” is ḫul gig. This word appears in our corpus in strict opposition to ki aġ₂, “to love”, as a literary means to reinforce their opposition: “A loving heart is something that maintains the household, a hating heart is something that destroys the household”.²⁵

The Sumerian language uses two more verbs for hostility: gu₂ du₃ and gu₂ bar. These verbs, composed with gu₂, “back of the neck”, belong to physiognomic language; they are a description of a hostile attitude perhaps borrowed from the animal world (bristled fur). This hostility is mostly attributed to the enemy.²⁶ It is found in concrete, warlike contexts in royal

²⁴ Inanna’s Descent to the Netherworld 354-358: igi mu-un-ši-in-bar igi uš₂-a-ka, inim i-ne-ne inim lipiš gig-ga, gu₃ i-ne-de₂ gu₃ nam-tag-tag-ga, en₃-še₃ tum₃-mu-an-ze₂-en, ku₃ dInanna-ke₄ su₈-ba dDumu-zi-da šu-ne-ne-a in-na-šum₂.

²⁵ SP Coll. 11.147-148 = InstrSur. 207-208:

Abū Salabīkh version: ša₃ ki aġ₂ niġ₂ e₂ du₃-du₃ ša₃ ḫul¹(RI) gig niġ₂ e₂ gul-gul

Old-Babylonian version: ša₃ ki aġ₂ niġ₂ e₂ du₃-du₃-u₃-dam ša₃ ḫul gig niġ₂ e₂ gul-gul-lu-dam (cf. Alster, vol. 1, 1997: 196).

²⁶ Enemies are described as barbarians who were deprived of any social code of behaviour, like in the Curse of Agade 155-156:

Gu-ti-um^{ki} uġ₃ keš₂-da nu-zu, dim₂-ma lu₂-ulu₃ ḡalga ur-e uktin / ugu²ugu₄-bi

“The Gutians, an unbridled people, (are) of human appearance, (but) with canine rules and monkey’s features”.



As Pongratz-Leisten (2001: 195) points out “the thought-process standing behind constructing the image of the Other is to be characterized as a systematic thought-process of inversion”. She explains that the processes of *de-humanization* and *demonization* of the enemy enable members of a cultural group to “trivializ[e] killing inhibitions” (ibid., 208, 227).

inscriptions of the Old Babylonian period: “The ones who were hostile against you, we shall strike them” (Akk. “We shall strike your enemies”).²⁷

Like “anger”, *hul gig* is an ambivalent emotion in Sumerian discourse: when opposed to *ki aĝ₂* it is clearly negative, but when employed alone it is close to a justified anger, a legitimate hatred of a negative object (or focus) (it can be interpreted as “X judges Y hateful”). This is not the case for *gu₂ du₃* and *gu₂ bar*, which are never employed in a moral judgement.

The three Sumerian verbs (*hul gig*, *gu₂ du₃*, and *gu₂ bar*) are translated by a single verb (*zêru*) in Akkadian. This difference between the conception of “hate” in Sumerian and Akkadian discourse on emotion reflects a cultural disagreement. *zêru* can describe a negative attitude and a legitimate negative moral judgement. In the latter sense it can appear in legal texts where for Meir Malul (1988: 113) it represents an act of rejection that leads to the dissolving of a contractual relationship.

The Sumerian word for “jealousy” (*ninim*) is astonishingly rare in the literature.²⁸ How can we understand that such a common emotion in modern culture as “jealousy” is attested only three times in Sumerian literature? One explanation should perhaps be sought in the cuneiform sign that we read *ninim*, which is a combination of the signs ŠA₃ “heart” and IZI “fire”

. This visual combination of “heart” + “fire” is reminiscent of another sign combination, KA “mouth” and IZI “fire” , which writes the word for “anger”, *urgu₂*. In both cases, the emotion appears as a fire, burning respectively the heart or the mouth. The sign is thus like an illustration of the emotion. The cuneiform signs and many other pieces of evidence, such as lexical entries, tend to show a semantic relationship between “jealousy” and words for “anger”. Thus, the distinction between “jealousy” and “anger” does not correspond to today’s criteria: in fact these two notions belong to the same Sumerian category, that of “anger”.

2.3. Reaction facing danger and loss: the emotions of “sadness”, “trouble”, and “fear”

The Sumerian and Akkadian languages are noteworthy for their lack of a specific word for “sadness”. All that we find in their vocabularies are words describing manifestations of sadness, such as *er₂* “tears”, *er₂ šeš₂/še₈-še₈* “to cry, to sob” (literally “to anoint with water-eye” as a description of the very act of shedding tears), *a-nir* “desolation”, *i-si-iš* “tears, lamentation, complaint” and metaphorical expressions mixing expression of sadness and

²⁷ Samsuiluna 7:19"-20" (Akk. 73): *lu₂ gu₂ mu-e-da-ab-du₃-uš-a saĝ ĝiš ba-ab-ra-ra-an-de₃-en = zā'irīka ninār* (cf. Frayne 1990: 386).

²⁸ See Civil 1990: 44-45.

words referring to rituals of lamentation ($er_2(-)a-ni-ra = ina bikīti u tānīhi$ “in the tears and the desolation” is an expression referring to the lamentations in general, and er_2 alone corresponds in Akkadian to *taqribtum* “complaint of supplication” (“Bittklage”) and to *pišertu* “rite of delivery” (from *pašārum*). *balaḡ-a-nir-ra* “the harps of desolation” and *gi-er₂-ra* “the reed of tears” are musical instruments used in rituals of lamentation. What does the absence of a generic word for “sadness” mean? It would be ethnocentric to assert that ancient Mesopotamians really experienced a basic emotion “sadness” but that they used different words to express it on different occasions, suggesting that they did not or could not generalize by giving it a single label the way English speakers do. All that the texts contain are facial and bodily expressions of sadness. Whatever might constitute an “emotional universal” would need to be identified in cultural terms valid for the Mesopotamian context, not in terms of the English lexicon of emotion.²⁹

A first observation of the contexts where an expression of “sadness” appears can perhaps explain the absence of a category. In letters, it is not right to burden one’s correspondent with litanies of personal problems: “Your transgressions are many, and therefore worry for you is eating me up!”³⁰ By contrast, litanies describing distress are characteristic of penitential prayers to gods. It was mostly seen as better to use an elliptical phrasing like the Old Assyrian standard phrase: *lā libbi ilimma*, “against the will of the god”, or more vaguely “unfortunately, sadly”.

The semantic field covered by one word can be different from one culture to another: $ša_3 kuš_2-u_3$ is a good example of a practically untranslatable emotion concept, rendered by Akkadian writers with *malāku* “to counsel” but clearly not equivalent to Akkadian word, still less to any English word. $ša_3 kuš_2-u_3$ means literally “to put a strain on the heart”; it appears in context of love; it is also the emotion of someone listening to music or writing a tablet. These usages suggest that the Sumerian word describes a kind of thrill, a vibration more than a “counsel”. This difference in usage of emotion words is connected in some way with cultural attitudes and cultural identity.

Two more words, $niḡ_2-me-ḡar$ and $mud_5-me-ḡar$, rendered in Akkadian by “silence (of death)” (*qūlu* later also *kūru*), are negatively perceived. They never mean “quietness”, which is sought by the gods in the myths of Atram-ḡasis or Gilgameš, but are associated with death, unhappiness, and prostration. Demons appear to be identified with this type of silence or can be the cause of it. But like many other Sumerian words, the context of this

²⁹ Harkins and Wierzbicka (2001: 8) emphasize that “We cannot treat English emotion words such as *anger* as neutral, self-explanatory, and culture-independent terms by means of which human emotional experience in all cultures can be validly and meaningfully described”.

³⁰ Lewy, KTS 15:7-8: *šillātuka mādāma u pirdātuka ētaklāni*.

type of silence is ambivalent³¹ since it seems also to evoke "joy", or at least sometimes a positive emotion or quality: "Inanna, who like a bull gores the disobedient, joy(?) of the land"³²

Many Sumerian and Akkadian emotion words are ambiguous and remote from our modern conceptions. To work on understanding emotion words involves studying the communication in its social context, a position between the individual and the social world ("a culturally constituted self"³³). Emotion concepts emerge as a kind of language of the self, a code about intentions, actions, and social relations. They need interpretation and "translation" to be communicated to others in different cultures and historical periods.

3. *Emotion as Grand Type*³⁴

Another direction in the study of emotions is the search for points of contact between these disparate elements: How can we find connections between such different concepts as "love", "hate", "trouble", "despair", "joy", etc., in the absence of any generic category given by the Mesopotamian themselves?

We have to make a transfer from the observation of semantic data to the complex network of grammatical, syntactic, and stylistic constructions, that is, the "meta-level of the evaluation of the written construction of social reality".³⁵ The terms for emotion are submitted to the multiple word choice of pressure and inertia, to the dialectic proper to languages, constantly shaped by the tradition of communication. The second step here is inductive and comparative. It is the comparison of diverse grammatical elements and syntactical forms that allows us not only to measure variations but also to catch a glimpse of the invariants of the whole. We can then make a relatively autonomous abstract framework of this set, other than semantic, and

³¹ Ambivalence in emotion is not incoherence, as each culture employs a set of words or expressions for ambivalent emotions that cannot be rendered by a single term in another language.

³² Išme-Dagan AB:6: nu-še-ga am-gin₇ si-mul di mud₅-me-ĝar kalam-ma.

³³ Cf. Lutz/White 1986: 417.

³⁴ Nissenbaum (1985: iii) subdivides the word "emotion" in "types" and "instances": 1) "emotion" is a grand type when it is used without plural form like the word "color"; 2) anger and joy are emotion's types. They are subtypes of the grand type and have a plural form; 3) individual having emotions at locations are instances. It is the concrete situation of a subject having an emotion.

³⁵ Cf. Pongratz-Leisten 2001: 216. Harkins and Wierzbicka (2001: 17) argue that "it is not only the lexicon that provides clues to the emotional universe of culture. Grammar does it too". For example, they indicate that active verbs like *rejoice* have disappeared from modern English usage, giving way to passive adjectives like *happy* or *pleased*.

it is on this framework that we can define new categories, morpho-syntactic ones this time, and functions.

In considering the problem on the basis of a new but still general framework, we have to introduce a reservation with regard to theories based on the constructions established with only one or two verbs of emotion, not because they are wrong, but because we have to consider them with the help of a larger number of examples. The Sumerian verbs form a separate field because of the prefix chain that summarizes the grammatical structure of the sentence. The prefix chain is extremely complex but very interesting, particularly among agglutinating languages like Sumerian.³⁶ Scholars have long proposed that most Sumerian verbs of emotion had a comitative ({da}) construction, the comitative indicating that the verb has a relationship *with* its object.³⁷

Ean. 1 v 1-5³⁸

e₂-an-na-tum₂, a ša₃-ga šu du₁₁-ga, ^dnin-ĝir₂-su-ka-**da**, ^dnin-ĝir₂-su, mu-**da**-
hul₂

"Ninĝirsu rejoiced over Eannatum, the seed placed in the lap of Ninĝirsu".

It is obvious that this assertion has to be differently qualified when applied on a larger scale. Verbs as common as "to love" and "to hate" for example, are conjugated with dative or directive infixes and/or a suffix following their object.³⁹ Most of the verbs expressing "fear", except perhaps hu-luḥ "to start, to be suddenly afraid", have a terminative ({ši}) rection expressing a direction *toward* its object. This could indicate that it does not belong to the strict category of emotion words.

Some verbs with the comitative rection, however, appear also in the absolutive state (unmarked construction) that gives them a factitive sense. More explicitly, in a comitative construction hul₂, for example, means "I rejoice about someone" (mu-un-da-hul₂-en [intransitive construction]), but in the absolutive unmarked state, it has the sense "I make someone happy" (mu-un-hul₂-en [transitive construction]). In such sentences, the emotion is expressed by a transitive verb, followed by a grammatical direct

³⁶ For a recent Sumerian grammar in English, see Jagersma 2011.

³⁷ Not all emotions have objects, for example the substantive arḥuš (= *rēmu*) "compassion, pity" is used to describe a positive quality of goddesses more than an emotion. Nissenbaum (1985: 84) argues that "predicates involving intransitive verbs often constitute cases of non-relational predicates. (...) They assert states of their subject (...)".

³⁸ Cf. Steible 1982, vol. 1: 123.

³⁹ These Sumerian verbs distinguish in their conjugation between a personal and a non-personal object. When the object of "to love", for example, is a human, the construction is dative ({ra}), while when the object is the city or an ex-voto, the construction is directive ({e}). This type of conjugation is characteristic of Sumerian composed verbs, cf. Attinger 1993: 233, 239.

object. These are similar to sentences with transitive verbs that describe actions.⁴⁰

What follows from these descriptions is that the construction of verbs with the comitative ({da}) seems to describe an internal emotion (“to feel oneself about X”) whereas the construction with dative/directive and with terminative would characterize an action toward an object (“to (re)act emotionally toward X”). The grammar of Sumerian verbs of emotion shows at least two categories of constructions that could be called both internal *and* active.

The construction of Akkadian verbs of emotion is simpler: it reflects in part the construction of the corresponding Sumerian verbs (*ḥadû* “to rejoice” is intransitive in the basic stem, but is transitive in the D stem, a stem that express factitive function: *muḥaddi libbi* ^d*Ištar* “the one who rejoices the heart of Ištar”). Verbs like *râmu* “to love” and *zêru* “to hate” are transitive in the basic stem (*ummašu irammušu attî jâti ul taramminni* “his mother loves him, but you do not love me”) and other stems from these two verbs are very rarely attested. These verbs are, as Kouwenberg (2010: 56f.) calls them, “fientive verbs with a stative meaning”.

3.1. Syntactic rules of valency

It is on the morpho-syntactic level that we explore the relationships between the constituents of the sentence in the discourse on emotion with particular attention turned to the variations. As Lemaréchal⁴¹ says, “syntax and semantics are linked because syntax imposes categorizations on reality. The syntax contributes to the communicating significance”.⁴² It is the nature of the constituents that largely determines the structure of a proposition. This structure implies a subject or an agent and, in this case, a reference to an object. As a judgement made about reality, the emotion leads to action or inertia, but the cause of the action or inertia can be either the subject or the object of emotion.⁴³

⁴⁰ Kenny (1963, 2nd ed. 2003: 138ff.) distinguish between “intensional” and “nonintensional” verbs, “the aim being a distinction that will include all psychological verbs under the heading “intensional” and all other under the heading “nonintensional”. Nissenbaum (1985: 24) disagrees with Kenny who “wants to avoid having to treat emotion verbs like action verbs and, likewise, their objects.

⁴¹ See Lemaréchal 1989: 14.

⁴² Also Sahlins 1981: 6f.: Circumstances “have no existence or effect in culture except as they are interpreted. And interpretation is, after all, classification within a given category.”

⁴³ Nissenbaum (1985: i) describes and discusses three main theories about “emotion’s object directedness”: 1) An object-directed emotion is related to a real concrete item; 2) An object arises out of the emotional (or intentional) state alone; 3) An object contains the cause or the explanation of the emotion.

The analysis proceeds along two fully developed lines. One line treats the relationships between the subjects and the objects in sentences with a verb of emotion, for example: *nārū muḥaddû libbi ilāni* “The musicians who make the hearts of the gods *rejoice*”.⁴⁴ The other line deals with the nature of verbs in a proposition containing one or many words of emotion, for example: *lugal-bi ^dNin-ĝir₂-su ḫul₂-la tum₂-mu-da* “To *bring* joy to their lord Ningirsu”.⁴⁵ The role of the object of an emotion in a sentence touches on the linguistic problem of valency and actancy.⁴⁶ As Nissenbaum explains in her book on “focus”,⁴⁷ the role of the object is mostly causal: “A simple theory based on this form of the condition is one that requires the object of the emotion to be the *cause* of the subject’s having the emotion” (1985: 6).

3.2. Stylistic aspects

One of the principal characteristics of the vocabulary of emotion in Sumerian is the presence of the word *ša₃* “heart”. The Mesopotamian conception of the world and the person is broadly binary, in that there is an inside (*ša₃* = *libbu*)⁴⁸ and an outside (*bar* = *kabattu* “liver”).⁴⁹ The heart, in the conception of the self, is the seat of emotion and the centre of thought. The morphological relationship of *ša₃* to the noun or the verb varies. It can be, for example, an “endocentric extension”, to use the terminology of Martinet.⁵⁰ An endocentric extension does not add information about the intrinsic features of the subject’s state but imparts an emphatic sense to the noun or

⁴⁴ YOS 1, 45 ii 29.

⁴⁵ Gudea Cyl. B ix 20.

⁴⁶ Lazard 1994.

⁴⁷ See Nissenbaum 1985; also Bamberg (1997: 309): “someone does something that *causes* someone else to become angry”.

⁴⁸ Beside *ša₃* “heart”, Sumerian also uses *ni₂(-te)* and *me(-te)* to speak about oneself as in a mirror. Other words that complete this picture are *ur₅*, which refers to lungs (often employed in parallel with *ša₃*), and *lipiš*, another word meaning more or less “heart”. The Akkadian vocabulary is less rich in this respect than the Sumerian: it uses *ramānu* to describe oneself; *libbu* “heart” is mostly employed in expressions of emotion.

⁴⁹ The Akkadian *kabattu* “liver” is not a translation of Sumerian *bar* “outside, periphery”. The Sumerian opposition *ša₃* / *bar* corresponds to the Akkadian *libbu* / *kabattu*; and it is logically artificial, indeed wrong, to make the equation *ša₃* = *libbu* and *bar* = *kabattu*.

⁵⁰ By endocentric extension, I understand everything that adds something to a concept without changing its syntactic function. For example, the adjective “big” in the sentence “He is a man with a big heart” is an *endocentric extension* because it only modifies the word “heart” (one can say “He is a man with heart”). In the same sentence, one cannot replace “big heart” with “sick” (to say “He is a man with a sick heart” has no sense). “Sick” in this case is an *exocentric extension* in relationship with “heart”, because it requires a transformation of the sentence’s structure (“This man has a sick heart”), see Martinet 1960: 131f.

verb.⁵¹ For example, *ša₃ gig lipiš gig* (corresponding to Akkadian *libbu* with *marāšu* “to be ill, sick”), which expresses sadness and trouble, *ša₃ ḫul* (*libbu* with *lemēnu* “to be bad”), *ša₃ dab₍₅₎-ba*, *ša₃ ib₂-ba*, *ša₃ mer-ra* for anger, irritation and an expression only attested in Akkadian: *libbu* with *parādum* “to tremble, to be afraid”. Among positive emotions, *ša₃ ḫul₂* (*libbu* with *ḫadû*) “to enjoy”, *ša₃ ḫuḡ* (with *nāḫu* “to calm, to soothe”), etc. The Akkadian idiom combining *libbu* with *nasāḫu* “to tear out” is an expression of despair. In Old Assyrian letters, the common idiom *lā libbi ilimma* means literally “against (the heart =) the will of the god” or more vaguely “sadly, unfortunately”.

Other stylistic particularities are typical of certain periods, like the diverse formulas that are found almost exclusively in a corpus of inscriptions of the Old Babylonian king Warad-Sîn of Larsa. These repetitive expressions make it possible to analyze similarities and variations in the grammatical construction of the sentence:

Warad-Sîn 3:35-36

niḡ₂-AK-ba-še₃ ^dNergal diḡir-ra-na ḫe₂-en-ši-ḫul₂
 “May Nergal his god rejoice for what has been done!”

Warad-Sîn 10:40-42

niḡ₂-AK-ba-še₃ ^dNanna lugal-ḡu₁₀ ḫe₂-ma-ḫul₂-e
 “May Nanna my king rejoice over me for what has been done!”

Warad-Sîn 11:14-15 (transitive *marû*):

niḡ₂-AK-ḡu₁₀-še₃ ḫe₂-mu-ḫul₂-e
 “(Inanna) rejoices indeed over me for what I have done”.⁵²

Also typical of certain texts is the repetition of terms in parallel sentences characteristic of liturgies:

Eršahunḡa to Anu 14-16⁵³

ša ₃ mer-a-zu	ki-bi-še ₃ de ₃ -ra-ab-gi ₄ -gi ₄
ša ₃ ib ₂ -ba-zu	ki-bi-še ₃ de ₃ -ra-ab-gi ₄ -gi ₄
ša ₃ ib ₂ si-ga-a-zu	ki-bi-še ₃ de ₃ -ra-ab-gi ₄ -gi ₄

⁵¹ There are many ways to express emphasis in the Mesopotamian languages: for example the use of the reflexive pronoun *ni₂-te* = *ramānu* to emphasize the subject of the sentence, or the independent personal pronouns in Akkadian or modal clauses with the prefix *ši-* in Sumerian used to express an emphatic assertion; cf. Jagersma 2010: 578f.

⁵² Frayne 1990: 207, 216, 218. Warad-Sîn developed a very personal style with new formulas in his inscriptions. The three fixed expressions found almost only there show grammatical variations from the standard construction of *ḫul₂* with the comitative: In Warad-Sîn 3, the conjugation of *ḫul₂* is intransitive with a terminative infix {*ši*}; in Warad-Sîn 10, *ḫul₂* is intransitive and contains the infix dative 1st. Pers. Sg. {*ma*}; in Warad-Sîn 11, the conjugation is transitive and *mu-ē* = *me* is an absolutive construction.

⁵³ Cf. Maul 1988: 75.

“May your angry heart turn back to its (former) place!
 May your furious heart turn back to its (former) place!
 May the fury of your darkened heart turn back to its (former) place!”

It is also typical that in letters from angry senders sentences such as “you are my father, you are my lord” are repeated several times. Letters also contain oaths sworn by the gods and rhetorical questions.⁵⁴

Such constructions are well known in Arabic and in Akkadian but are much more difficult to find in Sumerian. Style in Sumerian texts, already tackled by Attinger in his grammar (1993: 315-318), would merit further development.

Emotion words reflect, and pass on cultural models, and these models, in turn, reflect and pass on values, that is, preoccupations and frames of reference for the society (or speech community) within which they have evolved. In studies of the vocabulary of values (good/bad), and of words describing oneself (ni₂(-te)/me(-te) = *ramānu*), metaphors and stylistic constructions are secondary to the analysis of the discourse on emotion, but they do raise significant interesting issues. The lexicon of words for values, of description of oneself and metaphors, is quite similar on the whole to the process observed for the words of emotion. Information gathered with a view to these perspectives may serve as an element of comparison with the lexicon of emotion words. They give researchers who are focused on “purely emotional vocabulary” access to a vocabulary that does not fit in the same frame but touches it closely.

4. Conclusion

The designation “discourse on emotion” derives from critical and theoretical analysis of material mainly present in Sumerian, Akkadian, and bilingual literature. The texts show that a vocabulary of emotion existed in the languages of Mesopotamia. What are the implications of this conclusion? Starting from elementary questions concerning translation that can be misleading as well as instructive, I have tried to understand which ideas the languages of Mesopotamia conveyed with a specific terminology. The path to discover this cultural phenomenon is difficult as one has to be careful not to oversimplify the picture of a cultural environment that did not correspond to a modern one. The dangers that one can hardly avoid are, following Lutz (1988: 218), of three sorts: we interpret emotion as identical to

⁵⁴ Such analyses exist in other fields. Müller (1993) studies the phraseology and stylistic techniques in classical Arabic, attempting to formulate in abstract terms the repetitive expressions containing either a verb of emotion or all kinds of verbs – these latter being summarized under the heading “to do”; compare also the review of Ullmann 1995: 214-216.

ours, we see them as radically opposed to ours, or we understand them as less numerous and less intense compared to modern emotional normality. The intensity of an expression of emotion can vary depending on social codes, as has been shown for example by Briggs (1970) and others. Emotions are judgements that require social validation or negotiation to be realized, thereby linking emotion with social structure.⁵⁵ They are closely linked to the culture in which they are expressed, but they are not a homogeneous class. They can also change in the history of one cultural group, as Harkins and Wierzbicka have illustrated in the shift in the Shakespearean "wrath" to the modern "anger" which reflects the democratization of a society and the overturning of the feudal order. Because emotions are embedded in socially constructed categories, the "truth" of emotions (as of all subjective entities) is problematic.⁵⁶

Emotional experience is almost endlessly mediated through language. It is not possible to give a complete meaning list of the emotion words of the Mesopotamians as we are constrained by the available texts. We can only try to understand how and with which terms they expressed emotions, showing in which contexts and with which syntactic constructions they employed them. We must accept the assumption that the structure of sentences describing emotions reflects the structure of the world and, in particular, "emotion's object-directedness". Rather than "re-constructing" emotions, the historian must "de-construct" all the expressions incorporated into the very particular matrix of emotions in written texts and make a chart of all words found in the sources. Such an approach has the advantage of considering not the person who feels, but rather the discourse on emotion itself. To approach this discourse as an object of study is to address a cultural feature, and it allows a certain distance with respect to that object.

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⁵⁵ Solomon (1979: 31) pictures emotion as a "system of judgements". Emotions are active ways of "structuring our experience".

⁵⁶ If the function of the object of emotion is the *cause* or the explanation of the emotion, the object can affect the *truth* of the sentences in which they are embedded, cf. Nissenbaum 1985: 23.

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Zu diesem Buch

Die historische Emotionsforschung ist ein wichtiges interdisziplinäres Forschungsfeld. Nicht zuletzt die Auseinandersetzungen mit Fragen um biologisch fundierte Universalien und soziokulturell bedingte Partikularität und Relativität spielen dabei eine Rolle. Konzeptuelle Inkongruenzen zwischen heutigen Begriffen von Emotion und den Emotionskonzeptionen der Antike machen deutlich, dass Gefühle eine Geschichte haben und doch grundsätzlich zum Menschsein als solchem gehören.

Das Medium Bild eröffnet andere Möglichkeiten transkultureller Untersuchung als das Medium Sprache. Es kann deshalb einen wichtigen Beitrag leisten, um besser zu verstehen, wie im Alten Orient mit Emotionen umgegangen wurde: Werden auf Bildern aus Mesopotamien, der Levante und Ägypten in Gestik, Körperhaltung, Gesichtsausdruck etc. Emotionen wiedergegeben, und wenn ja, wie? Welche Bedeutung und welchen Stellenwert hat die Wiedergabe von Emotionen in der visuellen Kommunikation?

Die Beiträge im ersten Teil des Bandes gehen anhand von ausgewählten Beispielen der Frage nach, ob und wie in der altorientalischen Kunst Emotionen dargestellt werden. Die Lösungsansätze sind kontrovers: Der These, es handle sich in keinem Fall um eine Visualisierung von Emotionen, sondern um kulturelle Rollen beziehungsweise rituelle Inszenierungen, steht die Annahme gegenüber, dass sich hinter nonverbalen Ausdrucksformen durchaus Emotionen verbergen und lediglich das spezifische Methodenrepertoire gesucht werden muss, um die bildlichen Darstellungen angemessen zu deuten.

Der zweite Teil des Bandes enthält fünf theoretische Reflexionen aus komparatistischer, linguistischer und kunsthistorischer Perspektive. Mit dieser breit angelegten interdisziplinären Diskussion – Assyriologie, Ägyptologie, Archäologie und alttestamentlicher Wissenschaft – bietet der Sammelband, der aus einem Workshop anlässlich der 61. Rencontre Assyriologique Internationale in Bern und Genf im Juni 2015 hervorgegangen ist, einen Überblick über die wichtigsten Forschungspositionen zu diesem wichtigen Thema.

About this book

The history of emotion is an important interdisciplinary research field, not least because it touches fundamental questions about the distinction between psychobiology-based universals and socio-cultural, path-dependent and thus relative peculiarities. Conceptual incongruities between what is today understood as emotion and various views on emotions in antiquity should not distract from the fact that, while emotions do have a history, they substantially belong to all human experience as such.

Visual media and images open perspectives for transcultural research that differ from the testimony of texts. Their study can thus make a major contribution to a better understanding of emotions in the Ancient Near East. How were gestures, body postures, facial expressions etc. visualized in images from Mesopotamia, the Levant and Egypt and what role does the visualization play in communicating emotions?

The first part of the present volume takes concrete examples as a starting point and discusses the fundamental question whether or not emotions were represented and can thus be studied in Ancient Near Eastern art. Approaches and arguments are controversial: Some authors argue that there are no visualizations of emotions, but only of cultural roles and ritual embodiments. Their view is contrasted by other contributors, who assume that one may detect non-verbal expressions hiding emotions in visual representations and that it is crucial to specify the appropriate tools and methodologies to interpret them in an adequate way.

The second part offers five additional theoretical reflexions from comparative, linguistic and art-historical perspectives. With such a broad interdisciplinary approach including Assyriology, Egyptology, Near Eastern archaeology and Hebrew Bible/Old Testament studies, the volume offers a large panorama of the most important research positions on a fundamental topic.

The book results from workshop discussions held in June 2015 during the 61st Rencontre Assyriologique Internationale at Bern and Geneva. Contributors include John Baines, Dominik Bonatz, Izak Cornelius, Margaret Jaques, Othmar Keel, Sara Kipfer, Florian Lippke, Silvia Schroer, Andreas Wagner, Elisabeth Wagner-Durand, and Wolfgang Zwickel.